

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 3538

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT: THE CHURCH PURSUES MORE ACTIVE POLITICAL LINE

1. SUMMARY. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH DURING THE FIRST TWO MONTHS OF 1976 CONTINUED PUBLICLY TO PROPOUND ANTI-MARXIST THESIS WHICH CARDINAL POLETTI INITIATED IN OCTOBER 1975 (75 ROME 17109). THIS WAS EVIDENCED IN CONTENT OF SECOND DECLARATION OF PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE ITALIAN BISHOPS CONFERENCE (CEI), WHICH ONCE AGAIN REAFFIRMED IRRECONCILABLY OF MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY, IN A SERIES OF ANTI-MARXIST ARTICLES IN BIMONTHLY JESUIT JOURNAL "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA," AND THROUGH NUMEROUS ROUNDTABLES AND LECTURES IN ROME AND OTHER MAJOR ITALIAN CITIES IN WHICH LEADING CATHOLIC INTELLECTUALS PROVIDED RATIONALE AGAINST ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY'S (PCI) BID FOR NATIONAL POWER THROUGH "HISTORIC COMPROMISE". A NEW DEVELOPMENT DURING PERIOD WAS REVIVAL OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CATHOLIC CHURCH HIERARCHY AND THE CATHOLIC ACTION ORGANIZATION. END SUMMARY.

2. THE BISHOPS' SECOND DECLARATION

FOLLOWING ITS REGULAR WINTER MEETING FEB. 2-6, THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE CEI ISSUED DECLARATION WHICH:

- REAFFIRMED IRRECONCILABILITY OF CHRISTIANITY AND MARXISM;
- CONDEMNED ANY EFFORTS BY INDIVIDUALS OR GROUPS TO EXPLOIT CRISIS FOR PRIVATE OR PARTISAN BENEFIT AND CALLED ON ALL SECTORS

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TO MAKE MAJOR EFFORT TO ASSIST THE UNEMPLOYED, THE AGED AND THE

YOUNG, AND PROMISED CONCRETE CHURCH ASSISTANCE TO GROUPS AFFECTED BY ECONOMIC CRISIS;

-- DEPLORED ABSENCE OF COHERENT CATHOLIC VOICE IN ITALIAN CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA AND CALLED ON CATHOLIC ACTION ORGANIZATION TO PROVIDE CATHOLIC GUIDANCE ("MEDIATION") ON CURRENT POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES.

3. COMMENT: AS WAS TRUE OF FIRST DECLARATION, BISHOPS' SECOND DECLARATION WAS WIDELY DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT CHURCH PARISHES, ITS CONTENTS WERE ALSO PUBLISHED IN VATICAN ORGAN "L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO" AND CHURCH HIERARCHY PAPER "L'AVVENIER", AND WAS THE SUBJECT OF EXTENSIVE COMMENTARY ON VATICAN RADIO. IN LINE WITH DECLARATION, TWO CONCRETE ACTIONS WERE TAKEN WHICH LENT CREDENCE TO BISHOPS' SERIOUSNESS REGARDING ASSISTANCE TO POOR: CARDINAL COLOMBO OF MILAN CONSIDERED 122 MILLION LIRE (\$165,000 CIRCA) TO LABOR FUND FOR ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES OF UNEMPLOYED WORKERS, AND CARDINAL LUCIANI OF VENICE "AUTHORIZED" PRIESTS IN HIS DIOCESE TO FOLLOW HIS EXAMPLE IN PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO POOR AND HANDICAPPED THROUGH SALE OF CHURCH VALUABLES. ADDITIONAL PROOF THAT CHURCH HIERARCHY WAS SERIOUS IN SEEKING INCREASED CATHOLIC INVOLVEMENT IN SOCIO-POLITICAL PROBLEMS WAS LETTER SENT BY BISHOPS TO PRESIDENT OF CATHOLIC ACTION URGING IT TO BECOME "SCHOOL FOR FORMATION OF LAITY" AND INSTRUMENT FOR RENEWED ESPOUSAL OF TEACHINGS OF VATICAN COUNCIL II AND WORKING FOR THEIR ACTUALIZATION IN ITALY. END COMMENT.

4. REVIVAL OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION(CA)

IN EARLY FEBRUARY THE SECRETARY OF THE CEI TRANSMITTED IN BEHALF OF CEI TO THE PRESIDENT OF ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION, DR. MARIO AGNES, A DOCUMENT WHICH IN EFFECT PROVIDES RENEWED LEGITIMACY TO CA. IN DOCUMENT BISHOPS REQUEST CA TO :

-- SHARE WITH BISHOPS TASKS OF REBUILDING CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY;
--PLEDGE ITSELF TO BECOMING INSTRUMENT FOR PROPAGATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CONCILIAL TEACHINGS;
-- CARRY ON EDUCATIONAL ENDEAVORS AMONG YOUTH;
-- DEDICATE ITS EFFORT TO THE "ELABORATION AND DIFFUSION OF CHRISTIAN SOCIAL TEACHINGS" AND FOR PROMOTING OPINION AND ACTIONS THAT ARE COHERENT WITH CHRISTIAN VIEW OF MAN AND HISTORY. (CA MUST NOT, ACCORDING TO BISHOPS, BE DETACHED OR INDIFFERENT OF SOCIAL QUESTIONS AND THEIR POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS.);
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-- BECOME "COORDINATOR" OF ACTIVITIES OF VARIOUS CATHOLIC MOVEMENTS--WORKER, STUDENT, PROFESSIONAL, ETC.-- AND TO ASSURE "MORE ORGANIC LIAISON" AND SYNCHRONIZATION OF THOUGHT AND ACTIONS AMONG EXISTING CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS;
-- ASSUME "SPECIAL RESPONSIBILITY" IN ASSURING "CATHOLIC PRESENCE" IN FIELDS OF CULTURE AND MEANS OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATION AND TO SEE TO IT THAT TIES ARE STRENGTHENED BETWEEN VARIOUS INSTITUTES AND THE ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC NEWSPAPERS.

5. COMMENT: THIS EXPRESSION OF HIERARCHY'S CONFIDENCE IN CA IS SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT. SINCE THE EARLY 1960'S THE ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN PRACTICALLY INACTIVE IN POLITICAL ARENA. THIS WAS IN LINE WITH CHURCH'S CONCILIAR POSTURE OF DISENGAGEMENT FROM ITALIAN POLITICS. THE NEW CALL ON CA DERIVES FROM CHURCH CONCERN ABOUT RELATIVE INCOHERENCE OF CATHOLIC VOICE ON SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES.

6. REVIVAL OF CA AS MAJOR CATHOLIC INSTRUMENT HAS ONCE AGAIN RAISED ISSUE OF "INTEGRALISM". THIS ISSUE HAS NOT YET BEEN SQUARELY FACED, BUT ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT WHILE CHURCH WANTS GREATER CATHOLIC COHERENCE IT INTENDS TO RELY ON MORE THAN ONE CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION -- THE VATICAN IS ENCOURAGING BOTH CA AND COMMUNIONE & LIBERAZIONE (C&L) TO BE MORE ACTIVE PROPONENTS OF CATHOLIC OPINION IN PUBLIC ARENA. SOME OBSERVERS NOTE THAT THROUGH NEW APPROACH TO CA CHURCH IS ENDEAVORING INDICATE THAT C&L IS NOT ONLY ALTERNATIVE FOR CATHOLICS TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL ACTION AND THEREBY WARNING C&L NOT TO BECOME TOO INDEPENDENT OF HIERARCHY. NEVERTHELESS, CA IS DELIGHTED WITH NEW, FORMAL CHURCH MANDATE. ITS REGIONAL MEETINGS THROUGHOUT ITALY ARE ATTRACTING INCREASING PUBLIC ATTENTION. IN RECENT REGIONAL MEETING OF CA IN NAPLES, CARDINAL URSI AS WELL AS CA PRESIDENT AGNES WERE PRESENT, THEREBY INDICATING EXISTENCE OF CLOSER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATION AND CHURCH HIERARCHY. IN MEETING OF ITS NATIONAL COUNCIL IN LATE FEBRUARY, CA URGED ITS MEMBERS TO GIVE EQUIVALENT OF DAY'S LABOR TO FAMILIES IN LOCAL PARISHES WHOSE BREADWINNERS ARE OUT OF WORK. END COMMENT.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 ROME 3538

7. OTHER CHURCH-RELATED ACTIVITIES: DURING THE PAST TWO MONTHS THE CHURCH'S EFFORT TO STIMULATE MORE ACTIVE CATHOLIC PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS WAS ALSO OBSERVABLE IN THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES:

- CONTINUING SERIES OF ARTICLES IN JESUIT BIMONTHLY JOURNAL "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA";
- WEEKLY LECTURES AT HEADQUARTERS OF "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA";
- SERIES OF SEVEN LECTURES AT "CENTRO CULTURALE MOSCATI" IN A BUILDING HOUSING CATHOLIC ACTION.
- ROUNDTABLES AND LECTURES IN ALL MAJOR NORTHERN CITIES (E.G. MILAN, GENOA, TURIN, TRIESTE) IN WHICH EDITOR OF "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA" AND OTHER CATHOLIC INTELLECTUALS (MOBILIZED FROM VARIOUS CATHOLIC UNIVERSITIES SUCH AS UNIVERSITY OF MILAN, LATERAN AND URBANIANA) SPOKE ON THEME OF "THE CHURCH'S PRESENCE IN CHANGING ITALY";
- SERIES OF FIVE PUBLIC CONFERENCES AT PONTIFICAL SALESIAN UNIVERSITY ON THEME OF "THE LOCAL CHURCH: PASTORAL AND THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES," DEALING NOT ONLY WITH ROLE OF CHRISTIANS IN ECUMENICAL FIELD BUT ALSO IN SOCIO-POLITICAL FIELD (ON FEB. 26 THE PRINCIPAL SPEAKER WAS ARCHBISHOP ENRICO BARTOLETTI, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CEI).

8. (NOTE: FOLLOWING ANALYSIS IS BASED ON AN EMBASSY OFFICER'S ATTENDANCE AT VARIOUS LECTURES IN ROME AND A CAREFUL MONITORING OF REPORTS ON CHURCH ACTIVITIES ELSEWHERE IN COUNTRY.)

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9. COMMON THEMES: SERIES OF ARTICLES AND LECTURES HAVE TWO-FOLD MESSAGE: MARXISM IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH CHRISTIANITY AS LONG AS MARXISM REMAINS TRUE TO MARXIST-LENINIST TENETS AND RETAINS ATHEISTIC IDEOLOGY; CATHOLICS MUST THEREFORE CONVEY COHERENT VIEW ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL QUESTIONS. THE OBJECTIVE OF THESE ACTIVITIES IS TO INSTILL UNITY OF PERSPECTIVE AND TO RE-ESTABLISH "THE CATHOLIC WORLD" WHICH, ACCORDING TO CATHOLIC ANALYSIS (E.G. "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA"), HAS BROKEN APART DURING LAST DECADE AND, IN VACUUM CREATED, MARXISTS AND RADICAL LAICISTS HAVE BECOME DOMINANT FORCES IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LIFE. CATHOLIC RESURGENCE IS NECESSARY, ACCORDING TO ANALYSIS, TO PREVENT TRANSFORMATION OF CHRISTIAN-INSPIRED SOCIETY INTO AN "ALTERNATIVE SOCIETY".

10. THE SERIES OF LECTURES AND ROUNDTABLES IN ROME PLACED MAJOR STRESS ON PAPAL DOCUMENTS WHICH DEALT WITH QUESTION OF MARXISM (ROMAN NOVARUM, DIVINI REDEMPTORIS, AND EXCOMMUNICATION DECREE OF JULY 1, 1949, FOR CATHOLICS VOTING COMMUNIST), HIGHLIGHTING CONTINUITY IN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE REGARDING MARXISM, AND CONCLUDING THAT ONLY RADICAL REVISION OF MARXIST THEORY OF SOCIETY AND STATE COULD OVERCOME IRRECONCILABILITY OF CHRISTIANITY (OR DEMOCRACY) AND MARXISM. UNTIL THEN "UTOPIAN PROMISES" OF COMMUNISTS

REGARDING ADHERENCE TO POLITICAL "PLURALISM" ARE NOT TO BE TRUSTED.

11. EFFECTIVENESS: WHILE WE HAVE NO PRECISE GAUGE FOR MEASURING IMPACT OF THESE ACTIVITIES, WE SHARE OPINION OF POLITICAL OBSERVERS THAT CHURCH IS REACHING FAIRLY WIDE AUDIENCE AND THAT IT PROVIDES RATIONALE FOR POLITICALLY ACTIVE CATHOLICS AND THAT THROUGH THESE IT IS REACHING SUBSTANTIAL SECTOR OF POPULATION. AUDIENCES AT LECTURES HELD IN ROME (E.G. AT "CIVILTA' CATTOLICA" HEADQUARTERS AND AT CENTRO MOSCATI) HAVE OVERFILLED LECTURE HALLS, AND FOR THIS REASON, ORGANIZERS OF THE LECTURES AT CENTRO MOSCATI HAVE ANNOUNCED THAT BECAUSE OF THEIR POPULARITY LECTURES WILL BE REPEATED DURING MARCH AND APRIL. MOREOVER, AUDIENCES HAVE BEEN REPRESENTATIVE ACROSS AGE SPECTRUM, THEY HAVE BEEN ATTENTIVE, AND THERE HAS BEEN GOOD PARTICIPATION IN Q&A PERIOD. IN ADDITION, ALTHOUGH DOORS HAVE BEEN OPEN TO ALL COMERS AND LECTURES ADVERTISED IN PRESS, WE HAVE NEITHER OBSERVED NOR HAVE WE HEARD OF HECKLING OR CONFRONTATIONS BETWEEN AUDIENCE AND SPEAKERS. VOLPE

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